



Structural failures in Cuba: Indicators of state collapse or signs of a failed state?

Annual Report 2025



The cases displayed allow one to see first-hand the reality of Cuban civil society, which often faces repression by the authorities.

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Introduction

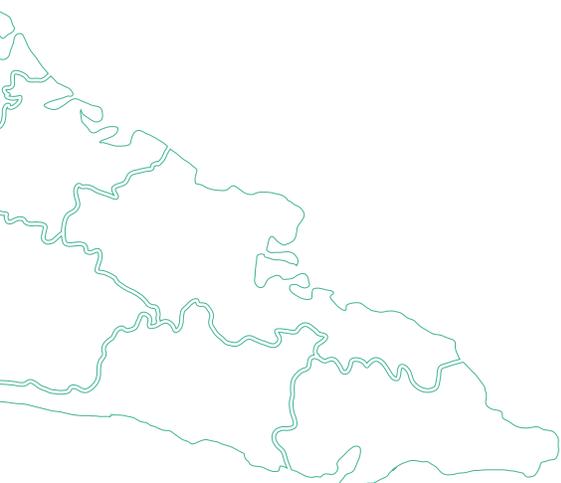
The *Eye on Cuba* network compiles information from reports sent by collaborators in the field, who identify, document, and denounce state actions that violate the exercise of fundamental rights, in accordance with the principles established in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

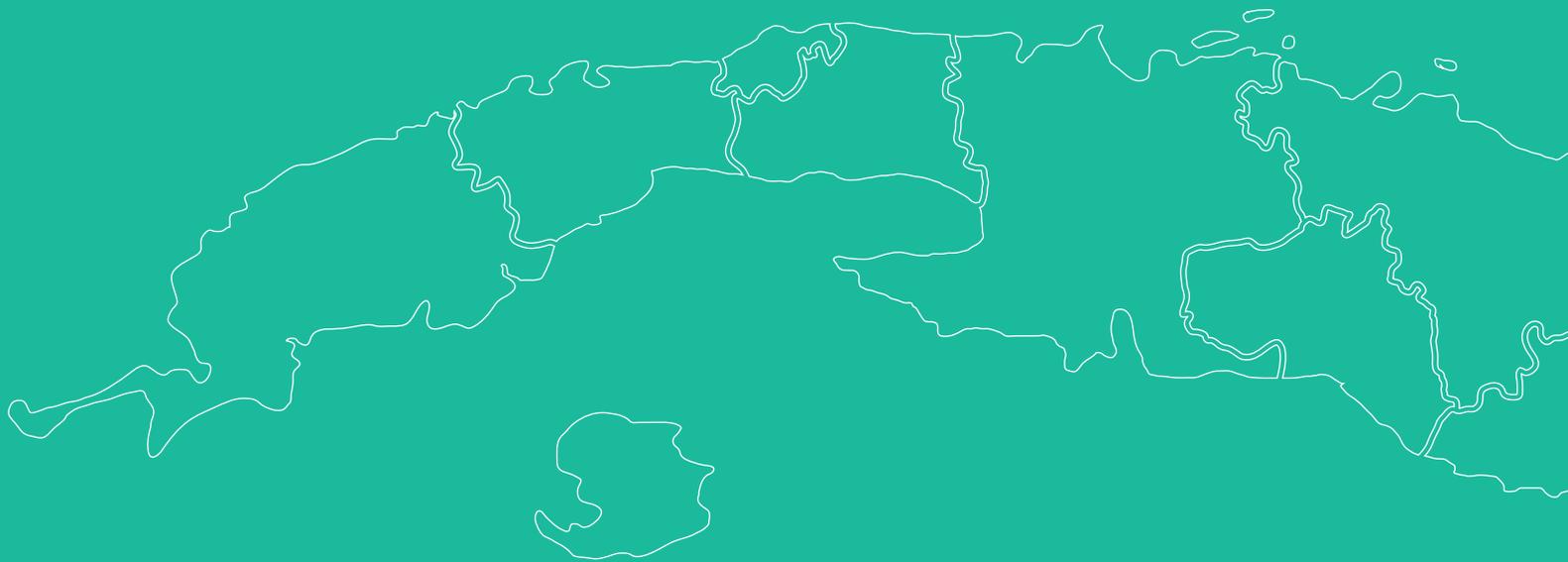
This report is based on the analysis of cases recorded during 2024, in which a total of 281 incidents were documented. Based on this evidence, it offers a critical look at the deterioration of the essential functions of the state, with the aim of understanding how certain government practices can lead to scenarios typical of a failed state.

The report also examines how the official narrative of abundance has led to a systemic crisis, whose social, economic, and humanitarian consequences define the present and condition the future of Cuba.

Eye on Cuba is a program of People in Need (PIN), a Czech non-governmental organization founded in 1992, committed to humanitarian aid and the defense of human rights. In response to the authoritarian context in Cuba, PIN began operations on the island in 1997, giving rise to this program, which focuses on documenting violations of fundamental rights, supporting civil society, and providing assistance to activists affected by state repression.

Through Eye on Cuba, PIN has for years accompanied citizens and local organizations facing legal and political obstacles, promoting respect for human rights and facilitating initiatives that cannot access formal international support.





Current context

For decades, the Cuban state built a narrative centered on the promise of guaranteed prosperity, based on a state model that offered social security and security, universal access to education and health care, and a minimum level of material well-being. However, in the current context, that narrative faces a deeply contradictory reality: the

country is undergoing a structural crisis that directly affects the living conditions of the population.

Chronic shortages of food, medicine, and basic goods, along with deteriorating infrastructure, a persistent energy crisis, and sustained increases in emigration, reflect the inability of the current economic model to meet the essential needs of citizens. According to CEPAL¹, Cuba faces a "low growth trap," with a projected GDP contraction of -1.5% in 2025 and stagnation by 2026, which deepens structural precariousness and further limits the possibilities for recovery.

¹ CEPAL (Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe). 2024. Estudio Económico de América Latina y el Caribe, 2024: Trampa de bajo crecimiento, cambio climático y dinámica del empleo. 13 de agosto de 2024.

The situation of the energy system is particularly critical. Chronic fuel shortages, prolonged power cuts, and obsolete infrastructure have forced the population to reorganize their daily routines around the availability of electricity, often resorting to precarious solutions. In rural areas, blackouts can last up to 20 hours a day, while in Havana, outages are almost daily, generating growing frustration and social unrest.

This widespread crisis has particularly severe effects on the most vulnerable groups. Older adults, women living in poverty, people with disabilities, and families with young children face greater obstacles in accessing basic services, increasing their exposure to malnutrition, preventable diseases, and a deterioration in their quality of life. Organizations such as Human Rights Watch² and independent reports have documented the progressive precariousness of these sectors, especially in areas outside the capital³.

In this context, economic, social, and cultural rights—such as access to health care, education, decent work, and an adequate standard of living—are seriously violated. Human Rights Watch warns that "shortages of food, medicine, and electricity have severely affected the well-being of Cubans" and denounces that the state's response to the demonstrations has been systematic repression⁵. This assessment is shared by various organizations and independent media outlets, which agree that 2024 has been "a disastrous year" for human rights on the island⁶.

In response to the inefficiency of the state system, a growing portion of the population has resorted to informal means of subsistence, such as barter networks, parallel markets, remittances from abroad, and unregulated activities. This underground economy—although essential for daily survival—reinforces inequalities and operates in an environment of high legal uncertainty and limited social protection⁴.

Thus, material deterioration is intertwined with a progressive closure of civic space, creating a scenario of multidimensional vulnerability. Although the state still retains key functions such as control of the repressive apparatus, certain bureaucratic structures, and basic services, its inability to guarantee fundamental rights, ensure minimum conditions of well-being, and offer sustainable development prospects raises legitimate questions about the real functionality of the system.

The depth of the crisis forces us to reconsider the extent to which the Cuban state retains the capacity to guarantee basic rights and govern effectively, a central question in assessing whether it is approaching the status of a failed state.

² Human Rights Watch. 2024. Informe Mundial 2024: Cuba. <https://www.hrw.org/es/world-report/2024/country-chapters/cuba>.

³ Hernández, Danelis. 2025. "2024, 'un año calamitoso' para los derechos humanos en Cuba según HRW." ADN Cuba, 17 de enero de 2025. <https://adncuba.com>

⁴ 2. Ibid., 2.

⁵ Human Rights Watch, Informe Mundial 2024: Cuba.

⁶ Hernández, "2024, 'un año calamitoso'".

Failed State

El colapso institucional: señales de un Estado fallido.

Since the end of the 20th century, the concept of "failed state" has emerged with increasing relevance in the fields of international relations, global security, and governance studies to describe those states facing profound crises of legitimacy, territorial control, and provision of essential public services. However, this term lacks a single, agreed-upon definition, which has generated academic and political debate about its limits, indicators, and analytical usefulness⁷.

Therefore, rather than a closed category, the concept of "failed state" should be understood as an analytical tool that allows us to approach complex realities of institutional weakening. It is not a single or definitive definition, but rather a guiding framework that helps identify common patterns in contexts of state crisis such as the one analyzed in this report.

Academic and political interest in failed states has grown in recent decades, not only because of their link to transnational threats, but also because of the recognition that their institutional collapse represents a profound failure in the provision of essential political goods. Failed states are unable to guarantee security, justice, education, or basic services, creating power vacuums that can be filled by violent or illegitimate actors⁸.

⁷ Rotberg, Robert I. *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.

⁸ *Ibid.*; 3.

Failed State

Failed state, fragile state, and collapsed state: conceptual distinctions

It is essential to differentiate between similar but distinct concepts.



A **fragile state** refers to those states that face significant difficulties in the functioning of their institutions and in the provision of services, although they maintain some territorial control and minimal legitimacy⁹.



In contrast, a **failed state** is one that has effectively lost control over significant parts of its territory or population, is unable to perform essential functions, and faces a deep institutional crisis¹⁰.



Finally, a **collapsed state** implies an extreme situation in which state institutions have practically ceased to exist, creating a power vacuum and scenarios conducive to violent conflict or anarchy¹¹.

This conceptual gradation is useful for understanding that a failed state should not be conceived as an absolute category, but rather as part of a continuum of weak or non-existent governance.

⁹ Fund for Peace. Fragile States Index 2024. Washington, D.C.: Fund for Peace, 2024.

¹⁰ Rotberg, When States Fail.

¹¹ 2. Ibid.

Indicators and methodologies for assessing state failure

Various institutions and studies have developed methodologies for assessing the degree of state fragility or failure. The Fragile States Index, developed by the Fund for Peace, uses indicators grouped into categories such as social cohesion, economic performance, political legitimacy, human rights, and service delivery¹².

Likewise, Rotberg¹³ highlights key factors for identifying a failed state, including:

- *Loss of the monopoly on violence.*
- *Inability to provide essential public services such as health, education, and justice.*
- *Prolonged economic collapse.*
- *Mass forced migration and displacement.*
- *Profound erosion of political and social legitimacy.*
- *Endemic corruption and institutional weakening.*

These indicators allow for a multidimensional analysis that goes beyond the simplistic view of a failed state as an exclusively political or economic concept.

Academic debates and conceptual limitations

The use of the term failed state has been criticized for its ambiguity and potential for political exploitation, such as to justify external intervention or stigmatize certain countries¹⁴. In addition, some academics warn that this category may oversimplify complex internal dynamics, overlooking processes of resistance, resilience, and state reform.

Therefore, the assessment of a state as failed requires consideration of both objective indicators and subjective perceptions of legitimacy and social cohesion, as well as the historicity and specificity of each case.

¹² Fund for Peace, Fragile States Index 2024.

¹³ Rotberg, When States Fail.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Fragments of a crisis: evidence from Eye on Cuba

This section presents a descriptive overview based on cases compiled by Eye on Cuba, highlighting the most frequently recurring problems, the regions and populations most affected, and the social conditions emerging from this crisis.

A total of 281 cases were collected, of which 188 were identified as human rights violations.

Classification of the 188 confirmed cases:

281

Cases were collected

188

Identified as human rights violations.

Type of right violated	Number of cases	Percentage
Economic, Social, Cultural, and Environmental Rights	73	38.8%
Civil and Political Rights	108	57.4%
Mixed violations (DESCA + Civil and Political)	7	3.7%



Havana, Cuba.

Below is a thematic classification of the rights violated, with the aim of highlighting patterns of abuse, facilitating analysis, and contributing to the demand for state accountability.

The categories detailed below reflect the breadth and severity of the harm suffered by individuals in different contexts and allow for an assessment of the scope of the repressive practices recorded.

Classification	Rights Violated
Economic, Social, Cultural, and Environmental Rights (ESCR)	These require positive action by the State to guarantee decent living conditions: Right to health Right to a healthy environment Right to adequate living conditions Right to adequate housing Right to work Social security/fair pension Freedom of enterprise Right to property
Civil and political rights	These protect individual freedoms and guarantees against state power: Torture and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment Right to personal integrity/life free from violence Right to personal safety and integrity Right not to be arbitrarily detained Right to due process Effective judicial protection Right to freedom of expression and opinion Right to freedom of assembly Freedom of movement and transit Right to private and family life Right to identity and access to documentation Right to receive, seek, and disseminate information Equality before the law Right to non-discrimination Freedom of religion
Violations with a mixed or cross-cutting approach (DESCA + Civil and Political)	Right to identity and access to documentation (civil + social) Right to an effective administrative response (political + institutional) Right to equality and non-discrimination (transversal to all rights) Right to personal integrity

Many of the cases documented by *Eye on Cuba* during 2024 cannot be classified under a single violated right. In practice, the same situation often involves several violations at the same time. For example, when a person is arbitrarily detained, they may also suffer ill-treatment, have their right to due process, freedom of expression, or even personal integrity affected. Therefore, although the list here is organized by type of right, it is important to note that in many cases these violations are intertwined and do not occur in isolation.

Some of the most common cases have been complaints about frequent and prolonged power outages. People often describe how they spend long hours on the street waiting for power to be restored. They report being intimidated into not commenting on the current discouraging situation. Many people were detained by the police for peaceful protests against power outages lasting many hours.

This coincides with the VIII Report on the State of Social Rights in Cuba, which found that for the first time, power outages surpass the food crisis as the main concern for Cubans.

Protests have erupted spontaneously, especially in low-income neighborhoods and in different parts of the city. A common form of protest is banging pots and pans with spoons, a tactic used to make noise and attract attention. We have recorded cases in which people were detained by the police due to participating in these spontaneous forms of resistance or summoned to the police station.

Another frequently mentioned problem is pensions. Many people complain about miscalculations of their pensions and the inability to obtain a solution from the competent authorities. We have also recorded cases in which pensions have not been paid at all, despite people being entitled to them.

These facts reveal a profound institutional deterioration in Cuba, where the state has failed to fulfill basic functions such as guaranteeing access to essential services, protecting citizens' rights, and offering effective mechanisms for responding to social demands. The repression of peaceful protests, the intimidation of those who express their dissent, and the negligence in the payment of pensions are symptoms of a state apparatus that operates more as a mechanism of control than as a guarantor of collective well-being. The lack of transparency, the absence of channels for citizen participation, and administrative inefficiency have eroded public confidence and turned daily life into a constant struggle against institutional neglect. Instead of addressing the causes of social unrest, the state responds with coercion, further exacerbating the crisis of legitimacy and governance.

Cuba and the Failed State

A **failed state** is one that has lost the capacity to fulfill its basic functions, such as controlling its territory, providing public services, and ensuring the safety of its inhabitants.

Typical features include the collapse of institutions, the loss of government legitimacy, the spread of violence, and the influence of armed non-state actors. Under such conditions, the state becomes unstable and unable to function as a sovereign entity in the international system.

The compilation and analysis of cases documented by the Eye on Cuba network reveal a complex and worrying picture of the Cuban state's ability to meet the basic needs of its population. Beyond recurring power outages, the structural crisis affects multiple essential aspects of daily life: the collapse of the sewer system, the constant shortage of drinking water, the rapid deterioration of roads and critical infrastructure, among others.

These fragments of a larger crisis show that, even though the state maintains a formal presence, it faces growing difficulties in guaranteeing fundamental public services. This situation not only affects the immediate well-being of millions of Cubans, but also represents a clear symptom of institutional fragility and a progressive weakening of the state's ability to fulfill its essential functions.

Cuba does not meet the criteria of the political science concept of a failed state and is closer to the notion of a fragile state. Its state structures have not collapsed: the government maintains a monopoly on force, controls the entire territory, and has security forces capable of maintaining order and repressing demonstrations of dissent. For this reason, Cuba does not appear among the worst cases in international indices such as the **Fragile States Index**. This is mainly due to the absence of armed conflict and the relatively low level of violence, factors that significantly reduce its score. However, this image can be misleading, as it does not reflect in depth the economic reality or the everyday social problems of Cuban society.

From an economic perspective, which is typical of fragile or failed states, Cuba shows several worrying signs.



La Habana, Cuba.

The country has been facing stagnation, an inefficient productive structure, and heavy dependence on its external partners for decades. Due to a centralized and inflexible economic model, the Cuban economy is unable to respond adequately to global changes or to guarantee the basic needs of the population. Power outages and shortages of food, medicine, and fuel have become part of daily life. This situation not only deteriorates the quality of life but also the legitimacy of the regime, as the state fails to consistently fulfill one of its essential functions: ensuring a minimum level of economic stability.

The social dimension of the Cuban reality reflects similar tensions. Although the regime has traditionally invested in education and health, the quality of these services has been deteriorating and cases on this issue are appearing more and more frequently in complaints. Many qualified professionals have emigrated abroad. Mass emigration is a clear sign of fragility: every year, tens of thousands of Cubans leave the country, generating not only demographic pressure but also a loss of human capital. Social discontent is growing, as demonstrated by the protests of recent years, which, although suppressed, revealed the population's unease with living conditions and the regime's political closed-mindedness.

In this sense, Cuba appears to be a state that formally remains in the "stable" category in international indices, but on closer analysis presents multiple characteristics of a fragile state. Economic vulnerability, social frustration, and dependence on external support indicate that Cuban stability is more of a precarious balance than a solidly consolidated situation. The absence of armed conflict still prevents Cuba from being classified as a failed state, but its underlying economic and social problems show that it is moving along the thin line between relative stability and structural fragility.



Conclusions

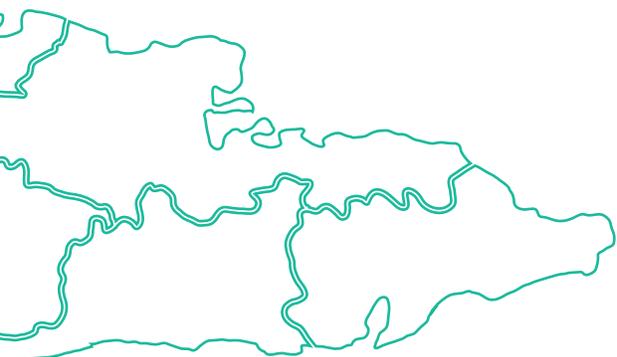
Although deficiencies in the infrastructure designed to guarantee basic economic and social rights have long been pointed out, there is currently a growing trend in both the frequency and intensity of complaints related to these shortcomings.

The documented cases show that both the central government and local authorities have either systematically ignored these problems or lack the institutional capacity to address them effectively.

This scenario points to a sustained escalation in complaints, as the structural conditions for substantial improvement remain limited.

In this context, it is crucial to maintain and strengthen documentation efforts in order to highlight the persistence of these violations and contribute to the development of enforcement and redress mechanisms.

The continuity of this work not only makes it possible to highlight the real dimensions of the crisis, but also constitutes an indispensable tool for national and international advocacy. In the face of persistent neglect, the compilation of cases becomes an act of resistance, memory, and demand for justice.



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